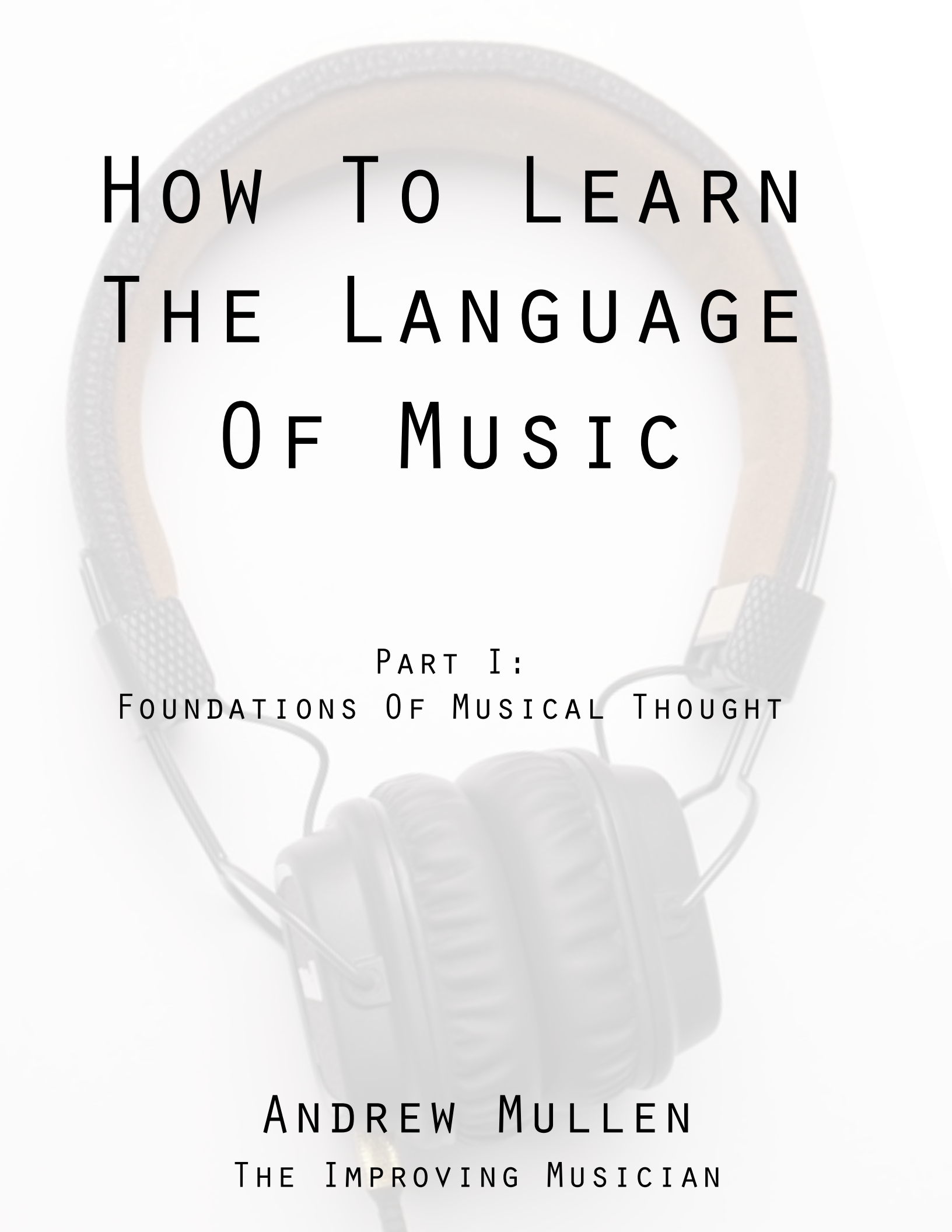

How To Learn The Language Of Music

Part I:
Foundations Of Musical Thought

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The Improving Musician

INTRODUCTION

Music as a Language

Although music isn't a language in the *strictest* sense, we can certainly communicate and interact with each other through music.

In order to communicate, we need to have something to say.

In language, we have **words**, which are given contextual meaning through the sentences we put them in.

In music, we have **patterns**, which are given contextual meaning when we put them in a tonal or rhythmic **context**.

Once we have patterns (words) and can give them context (sentences), we can begin to **think musically**. Thinking in music is called **Audiation**.

Audiation

The same way that we can visualize an image in our brain, we can "hear" music. We can have **musical thoughts.**

But to truly audiate, we must **understand** the thoughts we are having. This short book will teach you how to organize your musical thoughts.

Breaking the Music Code

Believe it or not, music is **noise** to many people. They hear it as a collection of sounds, and are not able to hear the individual parts that make up the whole.

Music has two overarching **frameworks**:

- Tonality
- Rhythm

Tonality can be broken up into two categories: **Melody and Harmony.**

To break the code of music, your goal is to learn:

- Rhythm Patterns
- Melodic Patterns
- Harmonic Patterns

To put it another way, you need to learn **musical words**, which you will be able to put together to make **musical sentences**.

Music as a Second Language

Although there are no *direct* correlations, think of learning music like learning a foreign language. You need to know:

- Nouns - you give things or objects a **name**.
    - **Dog**
- Adjectives - you **describe** the noun.
    - **The big** dog.
- Verbs - you do something **with** or **to** each noun.
    - The big dog **jumped.**
- Adverbs - **how** are you doing it?
    - The big dog jumped **quickly.**

You can't **think** in a new language unless you have nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs.

In order to think **musically**, you need to know:

- Rhythm
    - Is the music moving in 2's? 3's? Both?
    - What are the **rhythm patterns** being used?
    - What meter are we in? Duple? Triple? Something else?
    - How much SPACE is between the beats?
- Tonality
    - What is the Resting Tone?
    - Are we in Major? Minor? Something else?

- What is the underlying harmony? I Chord? V Chord? (**Harmonic Patterns**)
- What pitches is the melody using? (**Melodic patterns**)

By learning these basic concepts, you will be able to **break the code** of music, and understand what is going on “under the hood.” You will learn how to **audiate**, to think musically.

Musicianship Level 1

Because music is primarily an aural art, proficiency must first be attained aurally. **Musicianship Level 1** is achieved when one can audiate the **aural** foundations of music:

- Duple & Triple Meters
  - Macrobeats, Microbeats and Divisions
- Major and Minor Tonalities
  - I & V, Resting Tone, Melodic Patterns

DIY Guide To Audiation

On **The Improving Musician** website, there are a series of video lessons called **Audiation Station**. These lessons take you through, step by step, the process of learning to audiate.

These lessons are based on the research of **Dr. Edwin Gordon**, who developed a system for **learning music** called **Music Learning Theory.**

What follows is a summary of the main concepts covered in the Audiation Station video lessons leading up to **Musicianship Level 1**. Use these summaries in coordination with the videos to **teach yourself** how to audiate.

Use the **Musicianship Level 1 CD** to practice the Rhythm Patterns, Harmonic Patterns, and Melodic Patterns. Because **repetition** is the “mother of all learning,” you will want to reinforce these concepts until they are ingrained in your audiation, in your musical mind

PART 1: RHYTHM

Rhythm Concepts

Rhythm exists on **3 fundamental levels**:

- Big Beats (Macrobeats)
- Little Beats (Microbeats)
- Rhythm Patterns (Melodic Rhythm)

These levels interact with each other in **musical space** to form the rhythmic foundation of music.

Big Beats (Macrobeats)

Big beats, also known as **macrobeats**, are the **pulse** of music. It is what you would likely tap your foot to, or the beat you would move to if you were dancing.

Little Beats(Microbeats)

We can take that macrobeat and divide it into either **two** or **three** parts. We call these parts **microbeats**.

Microbeats define what **meter** we are in, and set the rhythmic **context**.

MICROBEATS

- If we divide each macrobeat into **two** microbeats, we are in **Duple Meter**.
- If we divide each macrobeat into **three** microbeats, we are in **Triple Meter**.

Movement and Rhythm

Rhythm requires coordination. Be sure you can move to both macrobeats and microbeats simultaneously. Put the macrobeats in your feet, and the microbeats in your hands.

Space as a Prerequisite for Time

Then, try moving your arms in free-flowing continuous **space** without beat. Acknowledging the space between the beats is very important because this will form the basis for consistent tempo. We superimpose musical time - that is, pulse - **on** space.

Watch the Audiation Station video, **Introduction to Rhythm Concepts,** for a more detailed explanation.

Rhythm Patterns

Once we have defined the first two layers of rhythm - macrobeats and microbeats - and, acknowledged the space in between, we have rhythmic **context**. We have a meter.

Now, we need **Rhythm Patterns**. Rhythm patterns are the **words** of rhythm.

Words	“Mary	had a	little	lamb.”
Rhythm Pattern	Ba ba	Ba Ba	Ba ba	Ba

Rhythm patterns are generally four macrobeats in length.

Learning Rhythm Patterns

Aural/Oral

We begin to learn rhythm patterns, and patterns in general, through a process called **Aural/Oral**.

We **listen** to the pattern (Aural), and then we **echo** the pattern back (Oral) using the neutral syllable, “Bah.” We then listen again (Aural) to the sound we produced to check for accuracy.

When we are a very young child, we learn words in the same way. Our parent tells us the name of objects - Mommy, Daddy, bottle - over and over, gently encouraging us to echo the name back to them.

Listen to the Duple and Triple Macro/Microbeat patterns on the following Audiation Station videos, and echo them back:

Rhythm Lesson 2: Duple, Aural/Oral

Rhythm Lesson 3: Triple, Aural/Oral

These 16 patterns (8 Duple, 8 Triple) will be your first rhythmic “vocabulary words.”

Verbal Association - Macrobeats and Microbeats

Once we can successfully **move** to macrobeats and microbeats simultaneously, and echo patterns at the Aural/Oral level, it’s time to **label** the patterns with a **Verbal Association**.

In language, we don’t need this step because we can visually see the object (Mommy, Daddy, bottle). In music, we need an extra step to label and organize what we hear.

The most effective system for labeling the layers of rhythm is the **Beat-Function** Rhythm Solfege series developed by Edwin Gordon and James Froseth.

Watch the video, **Beat Function Solfege System** for a thorough explanation.

VERBAL ASSOCIATION

Duple Meter

Macrobeats = DU
Microbeats = DU DE

Triple Meter

Macrobeats = DU
Microbeats = DU DA DI

PATTERNS

Listen to the patterns on the following Audiation Station videos, and echo them back:

Rhythm Lesson 4: Duple, Verbal Association

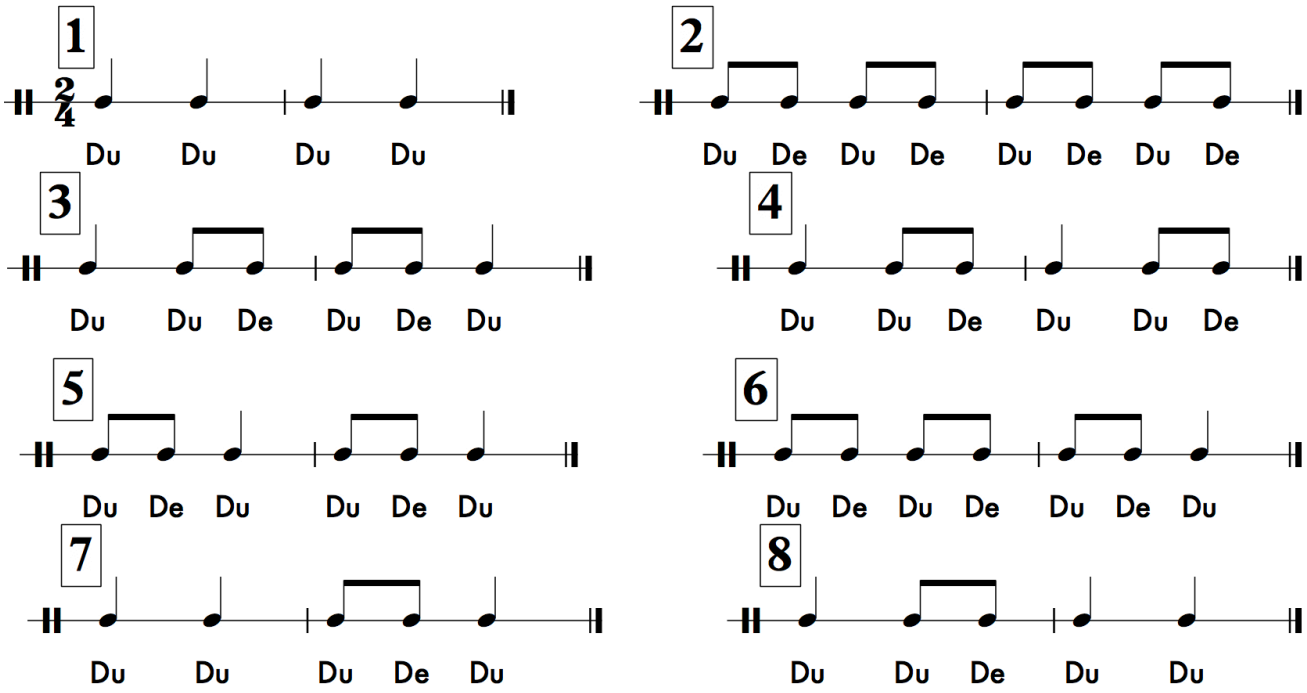
Rhythm Lesson 5: Triple, Verbal Association

These are the same 16 patterns that you learned at the **Aural/Oral** level.

Although we have yet to come to the skill of **Symbolic Association** (reading musical notation), following are the 16 rhythm patterns represented in music notation that are now part of your pattern vocabulary.

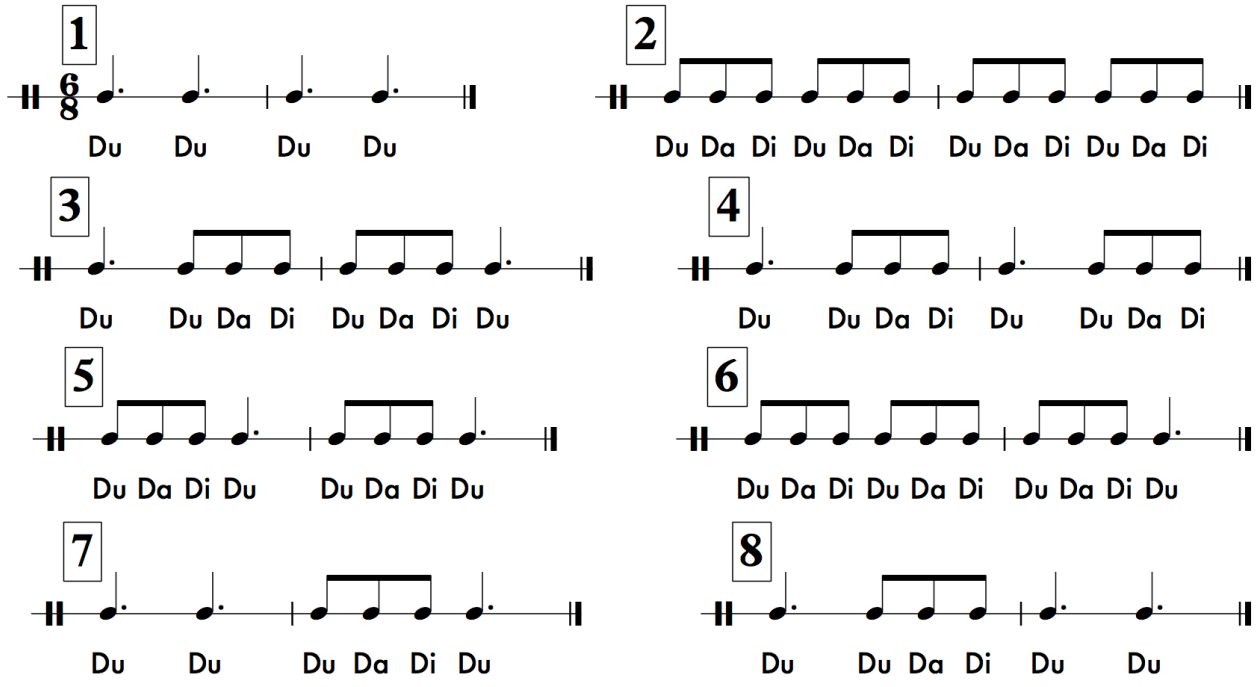
DUPLE

Macrobeats & Microbeats



TRIPLE

Macrobeats & Microbeats



Improvisation

Once you can successfully echo patterns in both Duple and Triple using rhythm syllables, it is time to put the syllables to work.

In language, we don't continue to echo the words our parents and teachers teach us. We put them together to "improvise" sentences in order to communicate ideas.

Can you "speak" in this rhythmic language? Can you ask yourself a rhythmic "question" and "answer" it?

Watch the following lesson on improvising rhythm patterns, where we explore the concept of **Same vs. Different**:

Rhythm Lesson 6: Improvisation

More Rhythm Functions

Once you have the foundation of macrobeats and microbeats in Duple and Triple meters, it is time to begin to audiate more **rhythmic functions.**

Because rhythm is so multi-layered, there are many rhythmic functions: divisions, elongations, rests, ties, and upbeats. There are also additional meters to consider.

Divisions in Duple and Triple Meters

For **Musicianship Level 1**, the last rhythmic function to master is **Divisions**.

When you take a microbeat and divide it again, it is called a Division. We will use the syllable “TA” to represent a division.

Watch the following lessons on Divisions in Duple and Triple meters.

Rhythm Lesson 7: Divisions in Duple Meter

Rhythm Lesson 8: Divisions in Triple Meter

VERBAL ASSOCIATION

Duple Meter

Macrobeats = DU
Microbeats = DU DE
Divisions = DU **TA** DE **TA**

Triple Meter

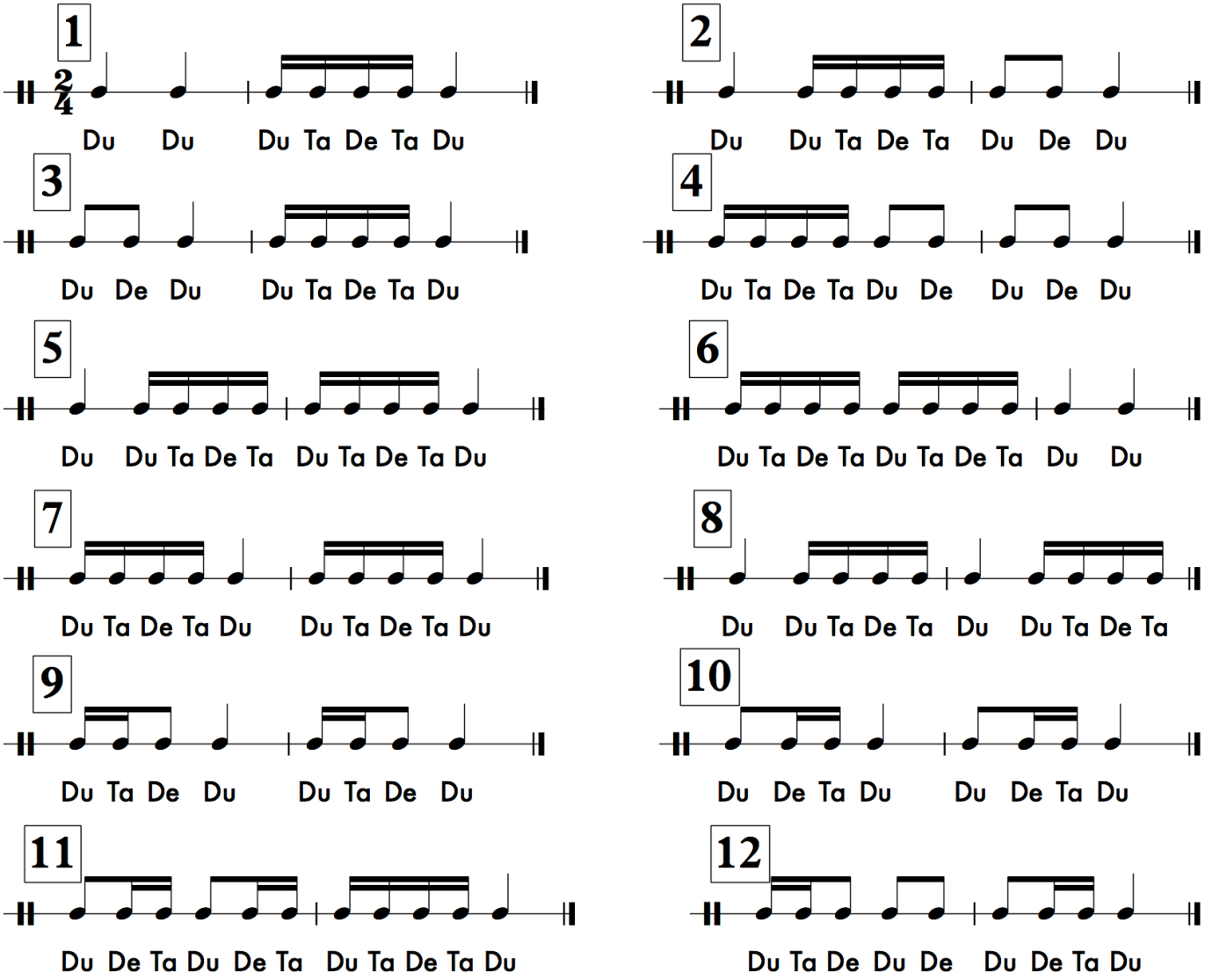
Macrobeats = DU
Microbeats = DU DA DI
Divisions = DU **TA** DA **TA** DI **TA**

Division Patterns

Although we have yet to come to the skill of **Symbolic Association** (reading musical notation), following are the 20 rhythm patterns (12 Duple, 8 Triple) with divisions that are now part of your pattern vocabulary.

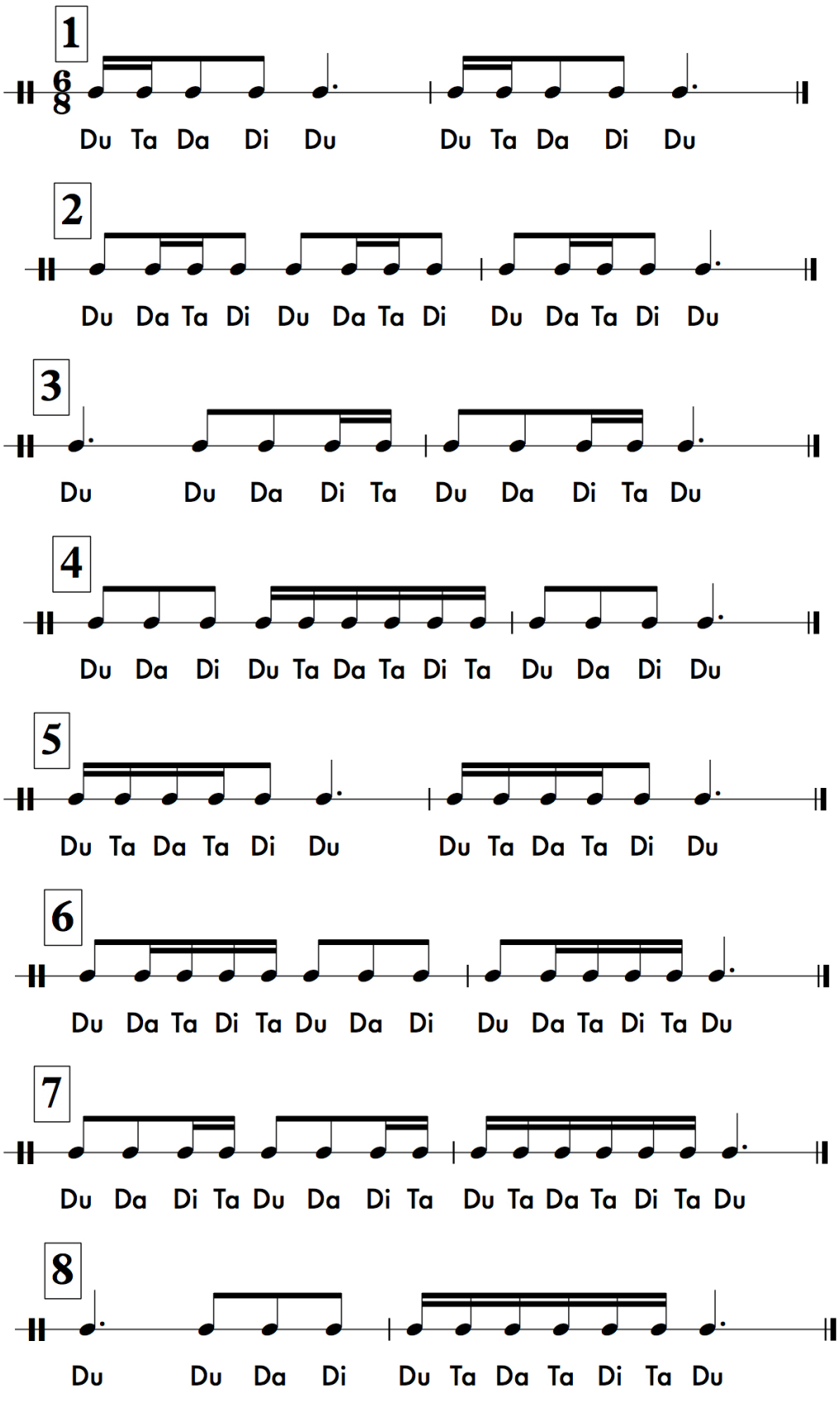
DUPLE

Macrobeats, Microbeats, & Divisions



TRIPLE

Macrobeats, Microbeats and Divisions



Moving Forward

If that's all there was to learning rhythm, then learning music would be a breeze! This is just the tip of the iceberg. However, mastering this material is the **foundation** for all future audiation, for all future musical thinking.

If you can "speak" the language of rhythm, then it becomes your property, and you can in turn make comparisons to anything else you hear.

Assessment

Finally, do the lesson, **Assessment for Musicianship Level 1**, to test yourself. Can you audiate rhythmically?

PART 2: HARMONY

Tonal Context

Music doesn't exist in a bubble. There are certain organizing principles.

In language, if someone said, "Jump dog very fence apricot canary at" we would hear each individual word, but the **context** of the sentence is unclear at best.

When a cat walks across a piano keyboard and plays a stream of random keys, those are indeed musical pitches, but they are devoid of musical context. At least for the cat.

In music, we give pitches context by placing them within a **tonality**.

What is a Tonality?

A tonality, to quote Dr. Edwin E. Gordon, of Music Learning Theory fame, is "defined by its tonal center, which is called a **Resting Tone**."

Resting Tone

Each tonality has a **resting tone**, a place where the music comes to a logical conclusion.

A resting tone has a musical gravitational force. Think, for example, of “The Star Spangled Banner.” The last phrase is, “And the home…of the...brave.” “Brave” is the resting tone. If we don’t get our resting tone, we are unsatisfied musically.

Organizing The Tonalities

Music Learning Theory classifies and organizes the tonalities in relation to their resting tone. To achieve this, we employ a system of verbal association using tonal solfege.

Watch this video for a thorough explanation: **Introducing The Tonalities**.

Moveable DO

A moveable-DO system, with a LA-based minor, is the most efficient system to organize the tonalities.

This system is a useful one because the half step relationship between MI and FA, and TI and DO, always remains consistent amongst the tonalities, with the single exception of Harmonic Minor.

So, if you are audiating DO as the resting tone, you are in the tonality of Major. If you are audiating RE as the resting tone, you are in the tonality of Dorian. And so on.

Much more detailed information, tutorials, and resources on all of the tonalities can be found at **The Improving Musician** website.

First Steps in Learning The Tonalities

Just as we did with rhythm, we need to learn skills and patterns, and will do it in a systematic way.

When we are first learning to audiate **harmonically** within the context of a tonality, we need to have **two tonalities** to compare.

The first two tonalities that we learn are **Major** and **Minor**. These will form the foundation for all future musical understanding.

Aural/Oral

The first series of lessons will use a **neutral syllable**. (“Bum”) We use a neutral syllable before the verbal association because the sound itself needs to be heard and processed before we give it a label.

In both Major and Minor, you will hear 15 harmonic patterns. You will engage with the patterns in the following three ways.

1. Sing only the **first pitch** of each pattern. This forces your musical brain to keep the first pitch in your memory while hearing additional content.

2. Sing the **resting tone** after each pattern. This sets up the “question and answer” aspect of music, and reinforces musical **context**. Good intonation as a musician comes from comparing pitches to the resting tone.

3. Sing the **whole pattern**. These 30 patterns (15 Major, 15 Minor) will form the foundation of your musical vocabulary.

You will learn them first in a **familiar order**, in a musical sentence, and will later be able to use these musical words in a different order to create new musical ideas.

Do these introductory exercises on the following YouTube videos:

Major Tonality

Tonal Lesson 1: Major, First Pitch

Tonal Lesson 2: Major, Resting Tone

Tonal Lesson 3: Major, Whole Pattern

Minor Tonality

Tonal Lesson 4: Minor, First Pitch

Tonal Lesson 5: Minor, Resting Tone

Tonal Lesson 6: Minor Whole Pattern

Once you have absorbed the lesson objectives, you may wish to skip right to the patterns. A CD called **Musicianship Level 1** also has the patterns on separate tracks. This is ideal for use in the car, or on the treadmill.

Labeling Resting Tone and Harmonic Function

Once we have heard, experienced and echoed the sounds of resting tone, individual pitches, and harmonic patterns, we need to **label** these sounds.

Just like in Rhythm, this is called **Verbal Association**.

Major Tonality

Resting Tone

Tonalities are organized by their **resting tone**. The resting tone in Major Tonality is **DO**.

Harmonic Functions, I and V

A melody does not exist by itself. It is supported by underlying harmony. We will begin by learning the two primary **harmonic functions** in each tonality.

In major tonality, these primary harmonic functions are

Tonic (I)

Dominant (V)

Most practicing musicians refer to these harmonic functions by their corresponding numeric names, **I** and **V**.

Tonic (I)

When you audiate combinations of **DO, MI, & SO**, you are audiating **Tonic Function**. We will call this a One-Chord Pattern (I). Or even simpler… "One."

Dominant (V)

When you audiate combinations of **SO, FA, RE & TI**, you are audiating **Dominant Function**. We will call this a Five-Chord Pattern (V). Or even simpler… "Five."

Exercises

Watch the following YouTube videos, and do the exercises.

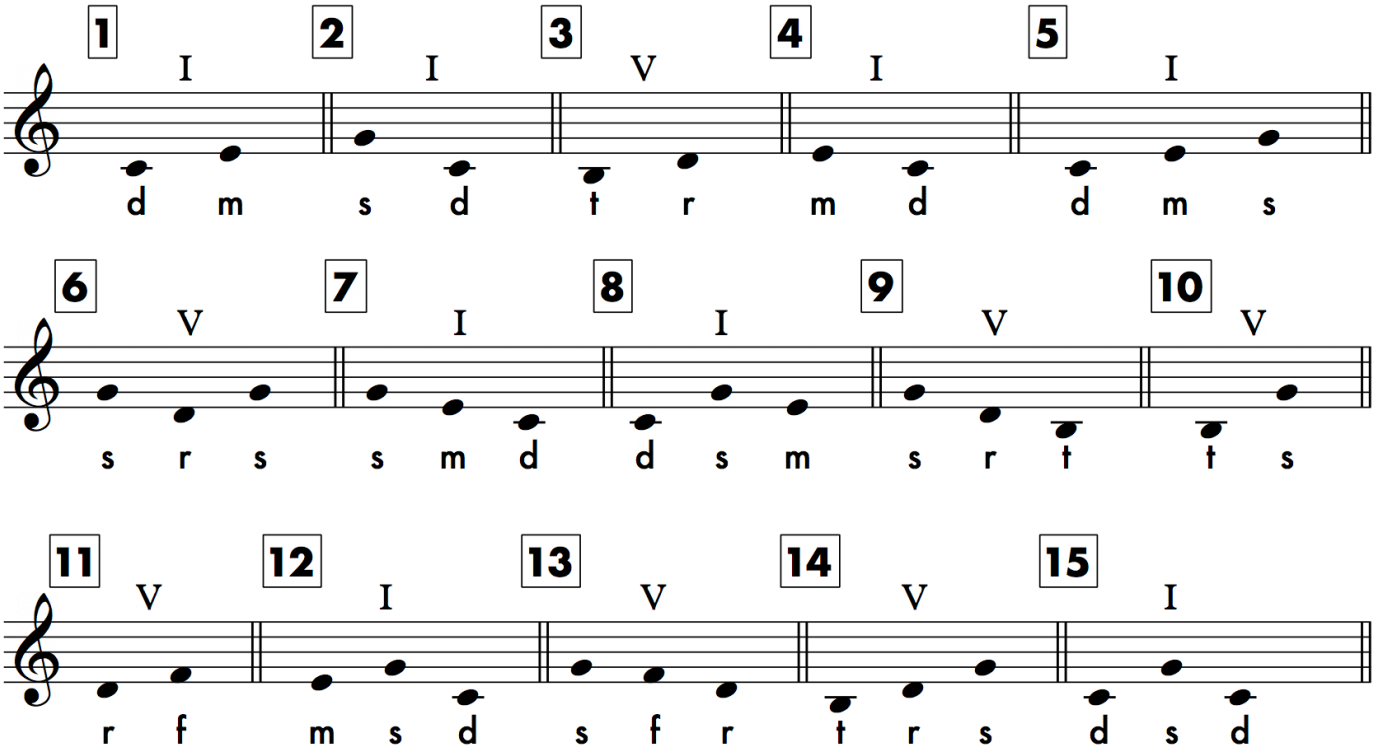
Tonal Lesson 7: Major, Verbal Association - Resting Tone, I+V

Tonal Lesson 8: Major, Verbal Association - I+V, Name The Function

PATTERNS

Although we have yet to come to the skill of **Symbolic Association** (reading musical notation), here are the 15 Major I & V patterns that are now part of your pattern vocabulary.

Major Tonality, I & V



Ideally, you should be able to engage with the patterns in the following ways:

1. Successfully **echo** the patterns. Be sure to take an audiation breath before you sing.
2. After hearing one of these familiar patterns, **label** the harmonic function by singing “one” or “five” on the chord root.
3. Memorize and **recite** the 15 patterns in **familiar order**.

Minor Tonality

Resting Tone

Tonalities are organized by their **resting tone**. The resting tone in Minor Tonality is **LA**.

Harmonic Functions, i and V

In minor tonality, the two primary harmonic functions are

Tonic (i)

Dominant (V)

Tonic (i)

When you audiate combinations of **LA, DO & MI**, you are audiating **Tonic Function**. Just as we did in Major tonality, we will call this a One-Chord Pattern (i). Or even simpler… “One.”

Dominant (V)

When you audiate combinations of **MI, RE, TI & SI**, you are audiating **Dominant Function**. Just as we did in Major tonality, we will call this a Five-Chord Pattern (V). Or even simpler… “Five.”

Exercises

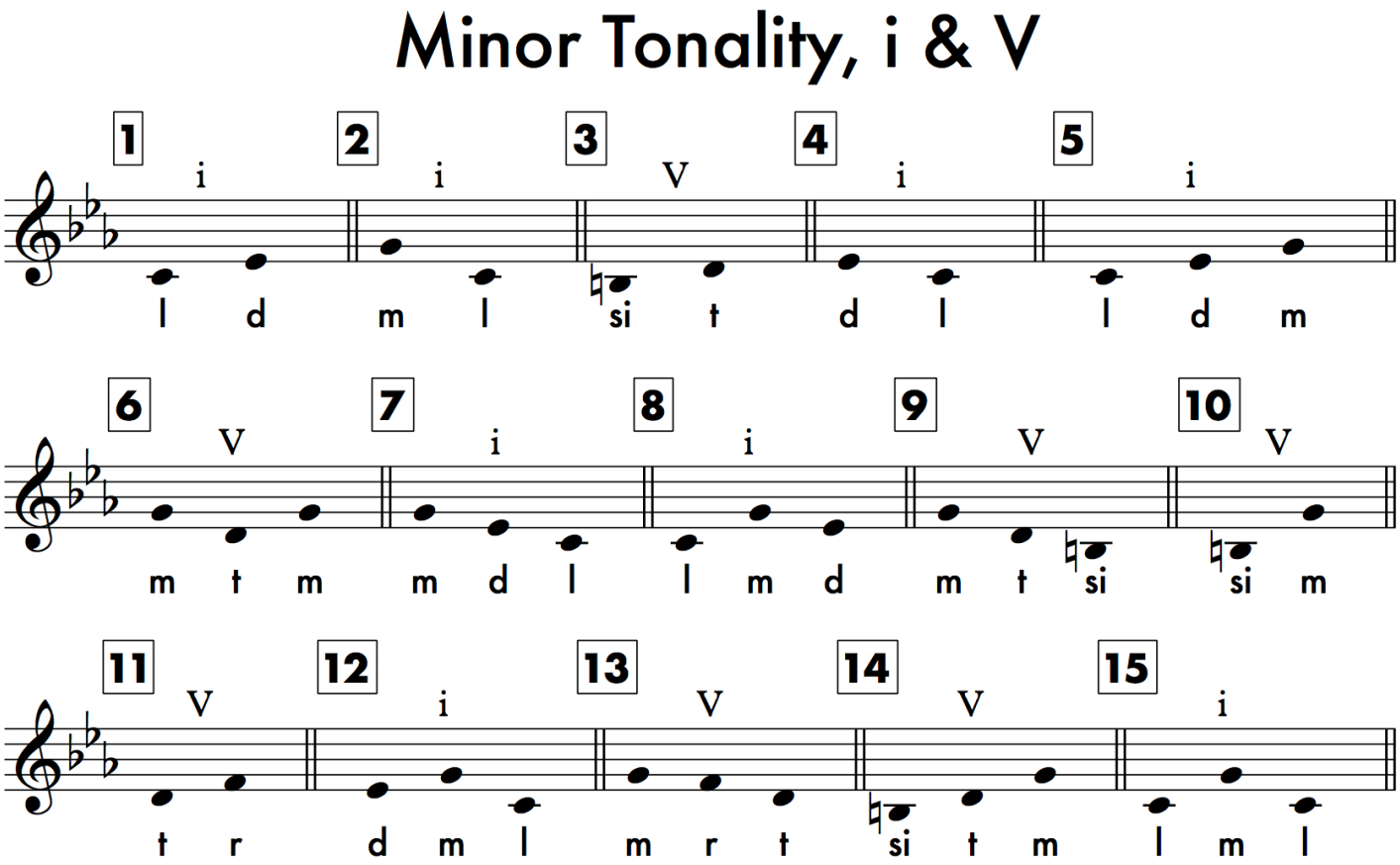
Watch the following YouTube videos, and do the exercises.

Tonal Lesson 9: Minor, Verbal Association - Resting Tone, i+V

Tonal Lesson 10: Minor, Verbal Association - i+V, Name The Function

Patterns

Here are the 15 Minor i & V patterns that are now part of your **pattern vocabulary**.



Ideally, you should be able to engage with the patterns in the following ways:

1. Successfully **echo** the patterns. Be sure to take an audiation breath before you sing.
2. After hearing one of these familiar patterns, **label** the harmonic function by singing “one” or “five” on the **chord root**.
3. Memorize and **recite** the 15 patterns in **familiar order**.

ASSESSMENT

Finally, do the lesson, **Assessment for Musicianship Level 1**, to test yourself. Can you audiate harmonically?

PART 3: MELODY

Harmony vs. Melody

To audiate tonally, we need to think about music organized in two directions: **horizontally** - that is, from left to right, and **vertically**, up and down.

Melody moves in a horizontal way, while **harmony** (our I and V chord patterns, for example) is organized vertically, up and down, to support and give **context** to melodic content.

Eventually, melody and harmony and rhythm intermingle with each other in many interesting ways, producing intriguing and complex musical textures.

But when we are first learning to audiate - to think musically - it's helpful to lay down a simple foundation of melody and harmony, and to isolate the musical elements.

Isolating Melody

So far, in our study of tonal audiation, we have been focused on organizing tonalities by their resting tones, and labeling **resting tone** and **harmonic** function.

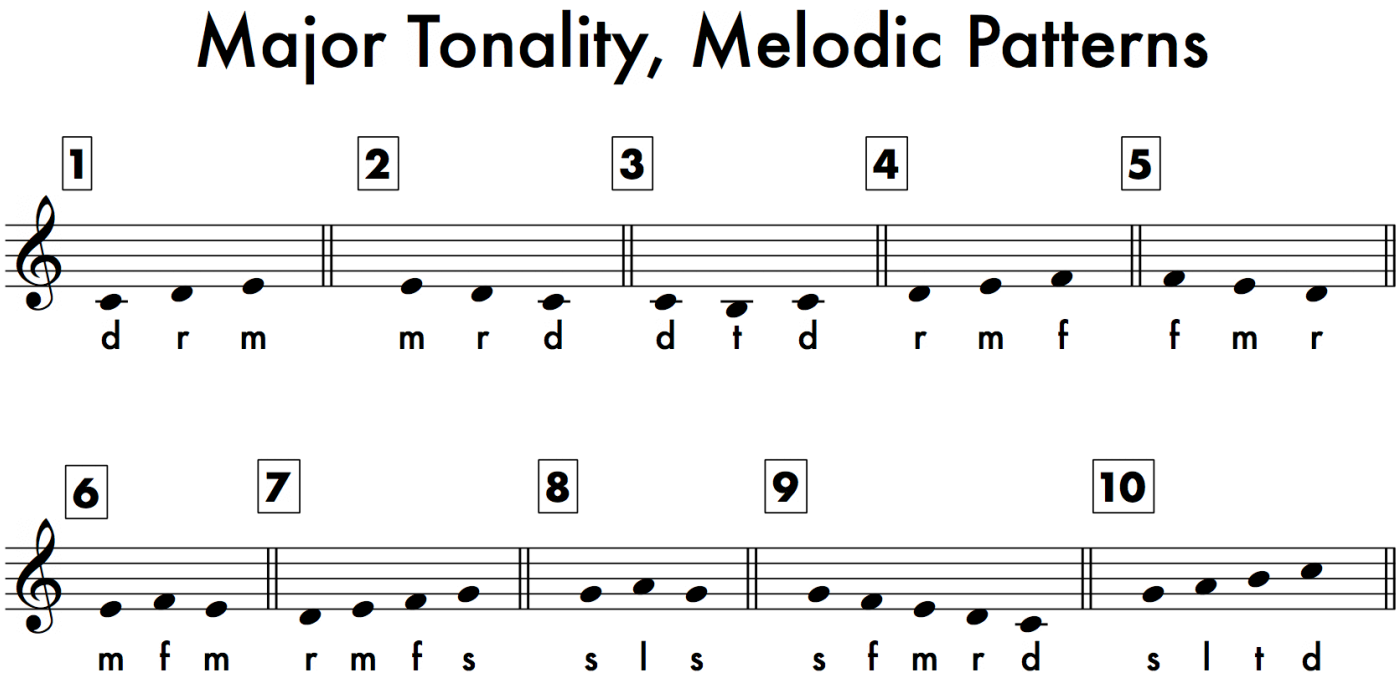
Now, let's learn some basic **melodic patterns**. As in previous lessons, we'll learn them first on a neutral syllable (Aural/Oral), then we'll add the solfege (**Verbal Association**).

Major Tonality

Watch the following lesson:

Tonal Lesson 11: Basic Melodic Patterns, Major Tonality

Although we have yet to come to the skill of Symbolic Association (reading musical notation), here are the 10 Major melodic patterns that are now part of your **pattern vocabulary**.

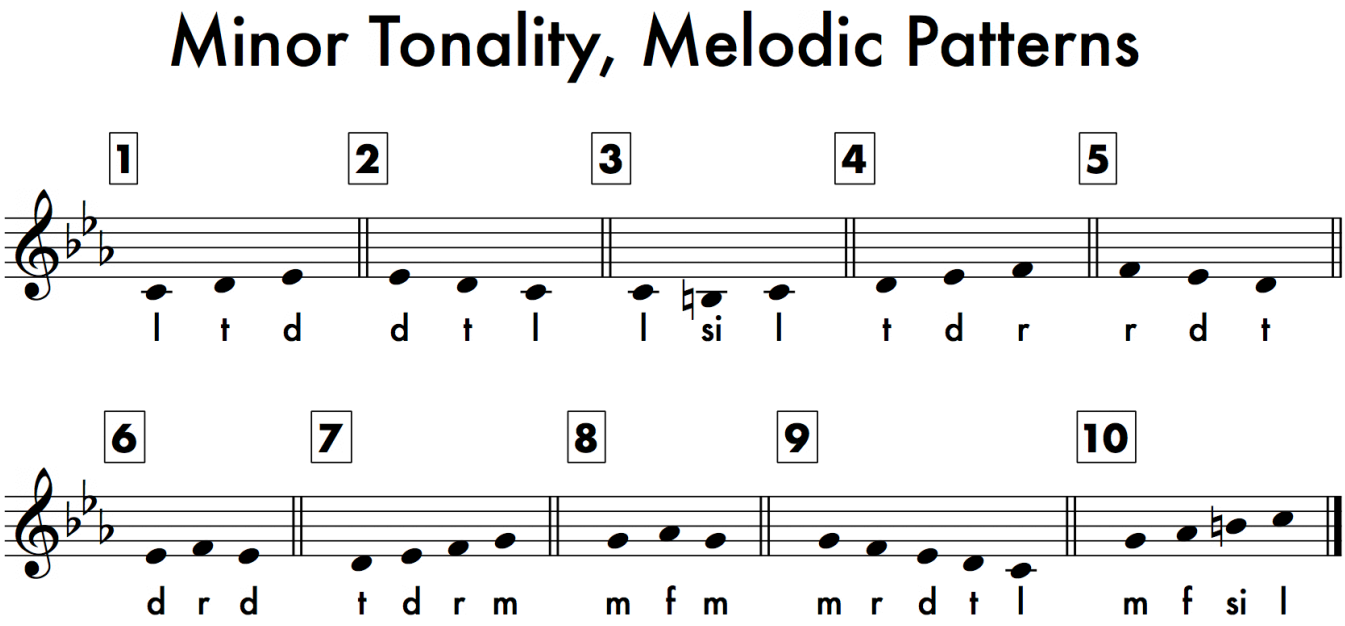


Memorize these familiar patterns in their familiar order.

Minor Tonality

Watch the following lesson:

Tonal Lesson 12: Basic Melodic Patterns, Minor Tonality



Memorize these familiar patterns in their familiar order.

ASSESSMENT

Finally, do the lesson, **Assessment for Musicianship Level 1,** to test yourself. Can you audiate melodically?

CONCLUSION

If you have successfully navigated **Musicianship Level 1**, you have the knowledge, skills, and musical vocabulary to audiate.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

The following will serve as a **summary** of Musicianship Level 1.

Tonality

- Tonality is audiated based on a **Resting Tone**
  - The Resting Tone in Major Tonality is DO
  - The Resting Tone in Minor Tonality is LA
- We can audiate melodically and harmonically
- In **Major Tonality**, our primary harmonic functions are
  - I (Tonic) = DO MI SO
  - V (Dominant) = SO FA RE TI
- In **Minor Tonality**, our primary harmonic functions are
  - i (Tonic) = LA DO MI
  - V (Dominant) = MI RE TI SI
- We can audiate and sing **chord roots** to harmonic functions.
- We learn **melodic patterns** in **familiar order**. These will serve as the basis for our initial tonal reading experiences.

Rhythm

- Rhythm exists on 3 fundamental levels:
  - Big Beats (Macrobeats)
  - Little Beats (Microbeats)
  - Rhythm Patterns
- Macrobeats define the tempo
- Microbeats define the meter
  - In Duple Meter, the Microbeats are DU DE
  - In Triple Meter, the Microbeats are DU DA DI
- To further divide the beat, we use the syllable TA
  - In Duple Meter, Divisions of microbeats are DU-Ta DE-Ta
  - In Triple Meter, Divisions of microbeats are DU-Ta DA-Ta DI-Ta

Pattern Taxonomy

Following is a reference taxonomy of all the 86 patterns that are now part of your pattern vocabulary.

For ease of reading, tonal solfege syllables are abbreviated as follows:

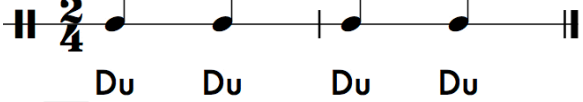
DO = d
RE = r
MI = m
FA = f
SO = s
LA = l
TI = t

RHYTHM

DUPLE

Macrobeats & Microbeats

1



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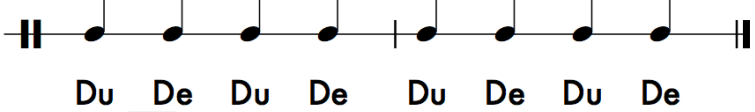

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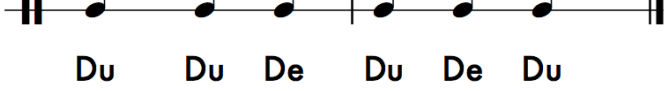

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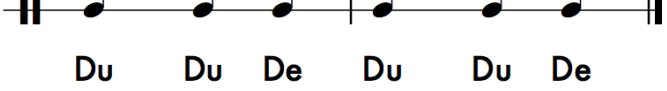

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TRIPLE

Macrobeats & Microbeats

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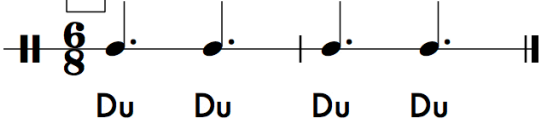

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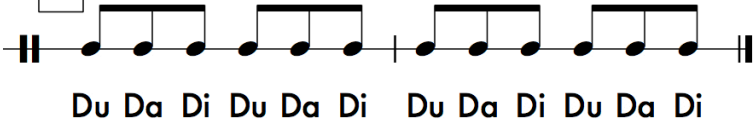

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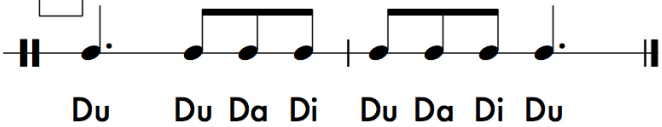

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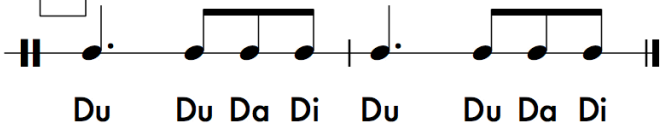

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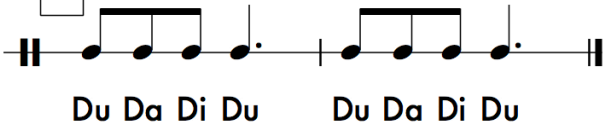

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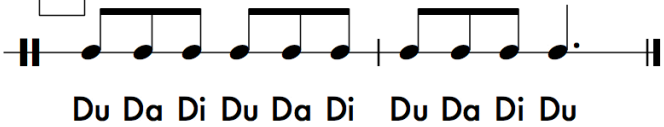

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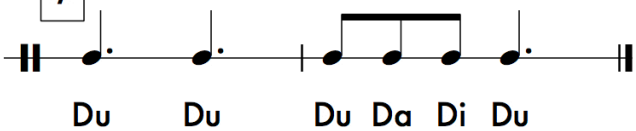

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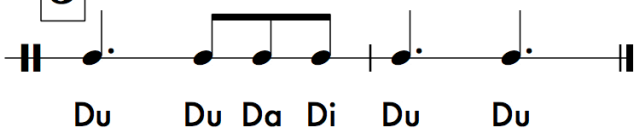
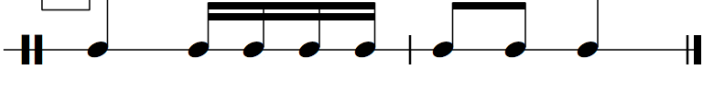


DUPLE

Macrobeats, Microbeats, & Divisions

1

2



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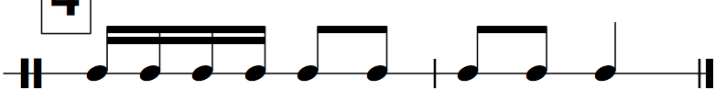

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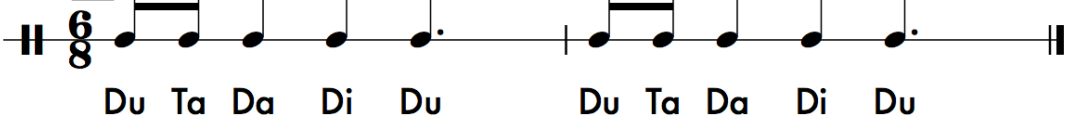
12

TRIPLE

Macrobeats, Microbeats and Divisions

1



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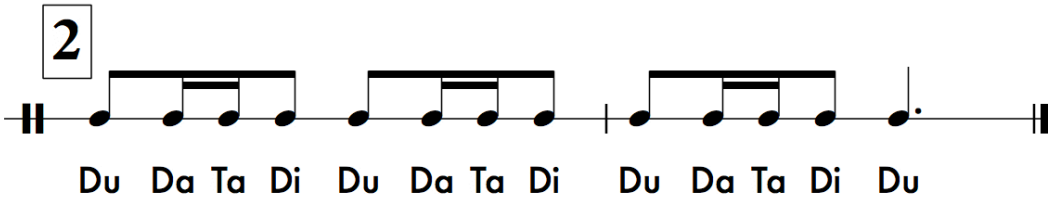

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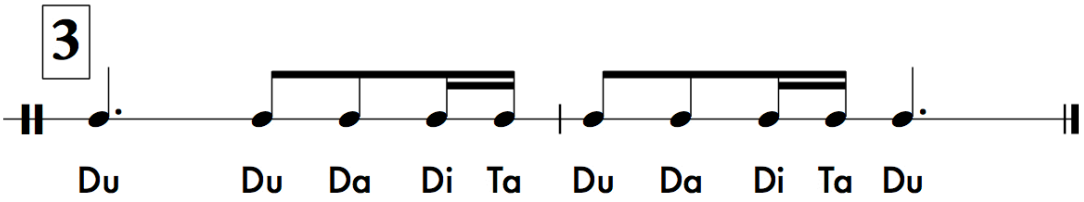

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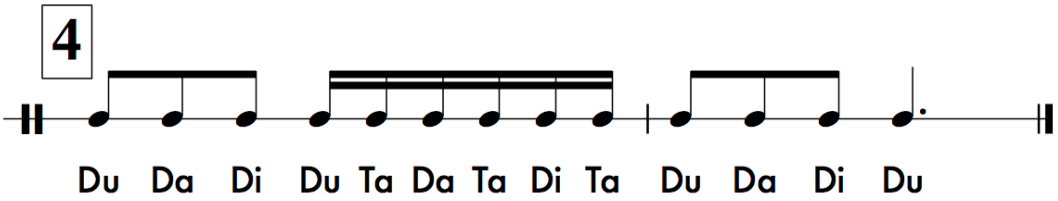

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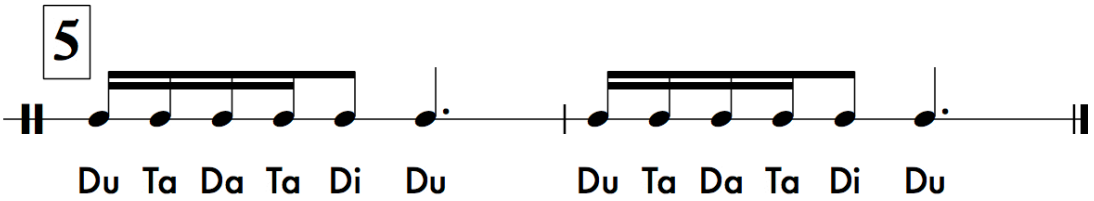

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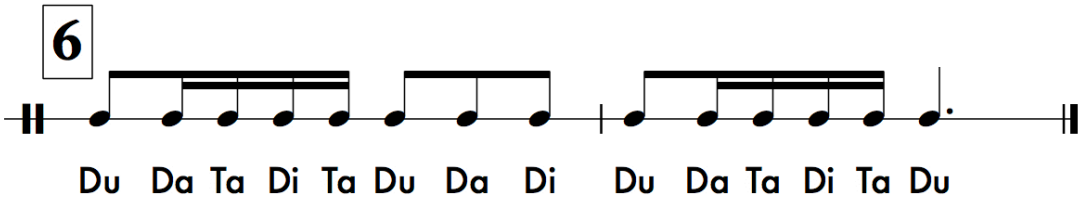

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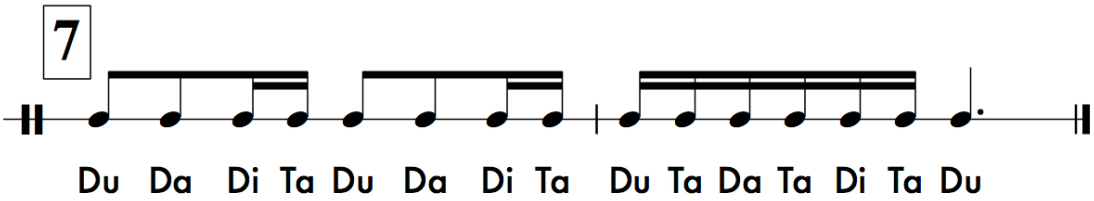

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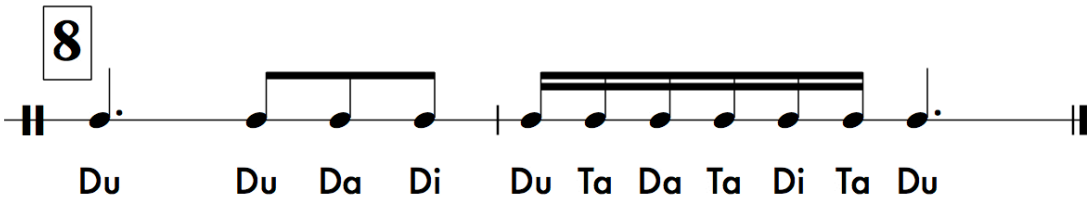
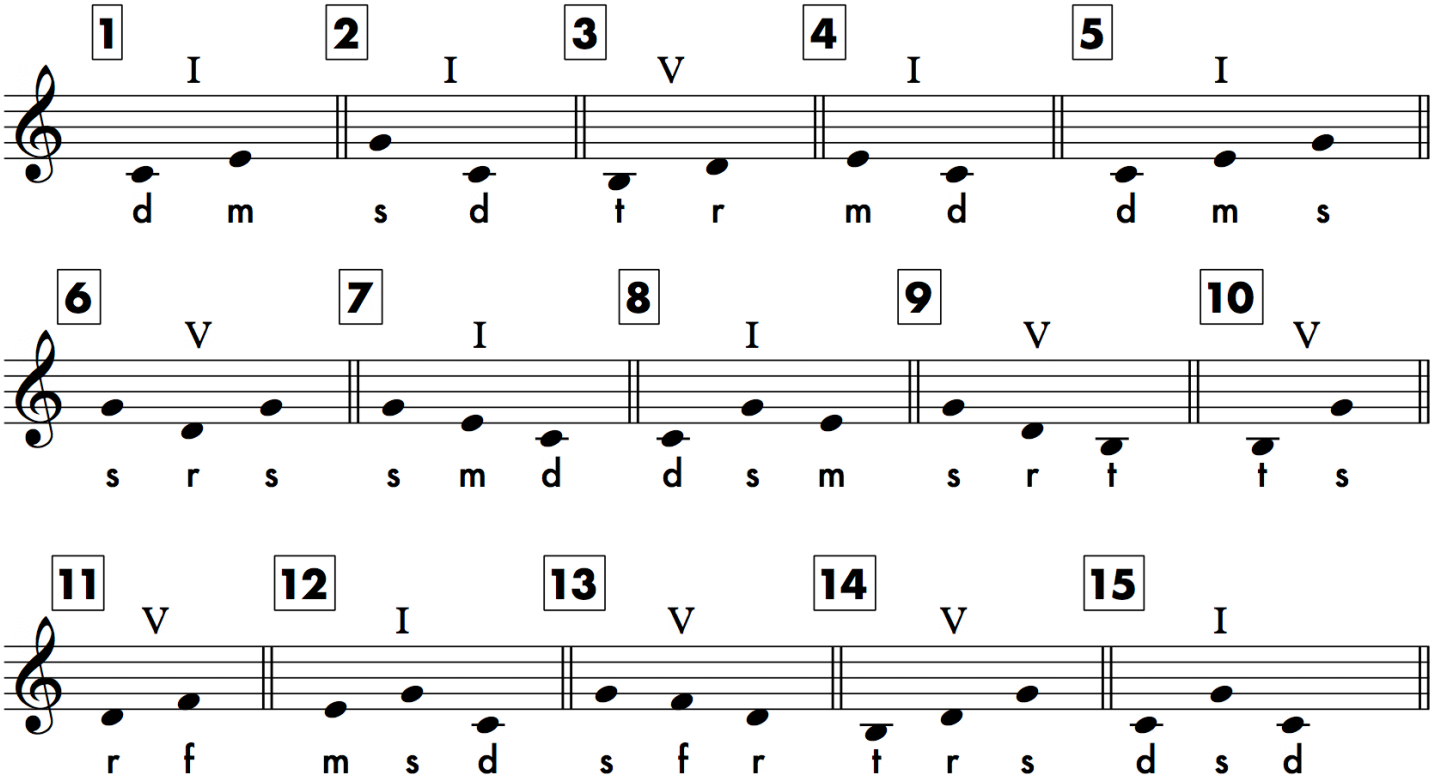
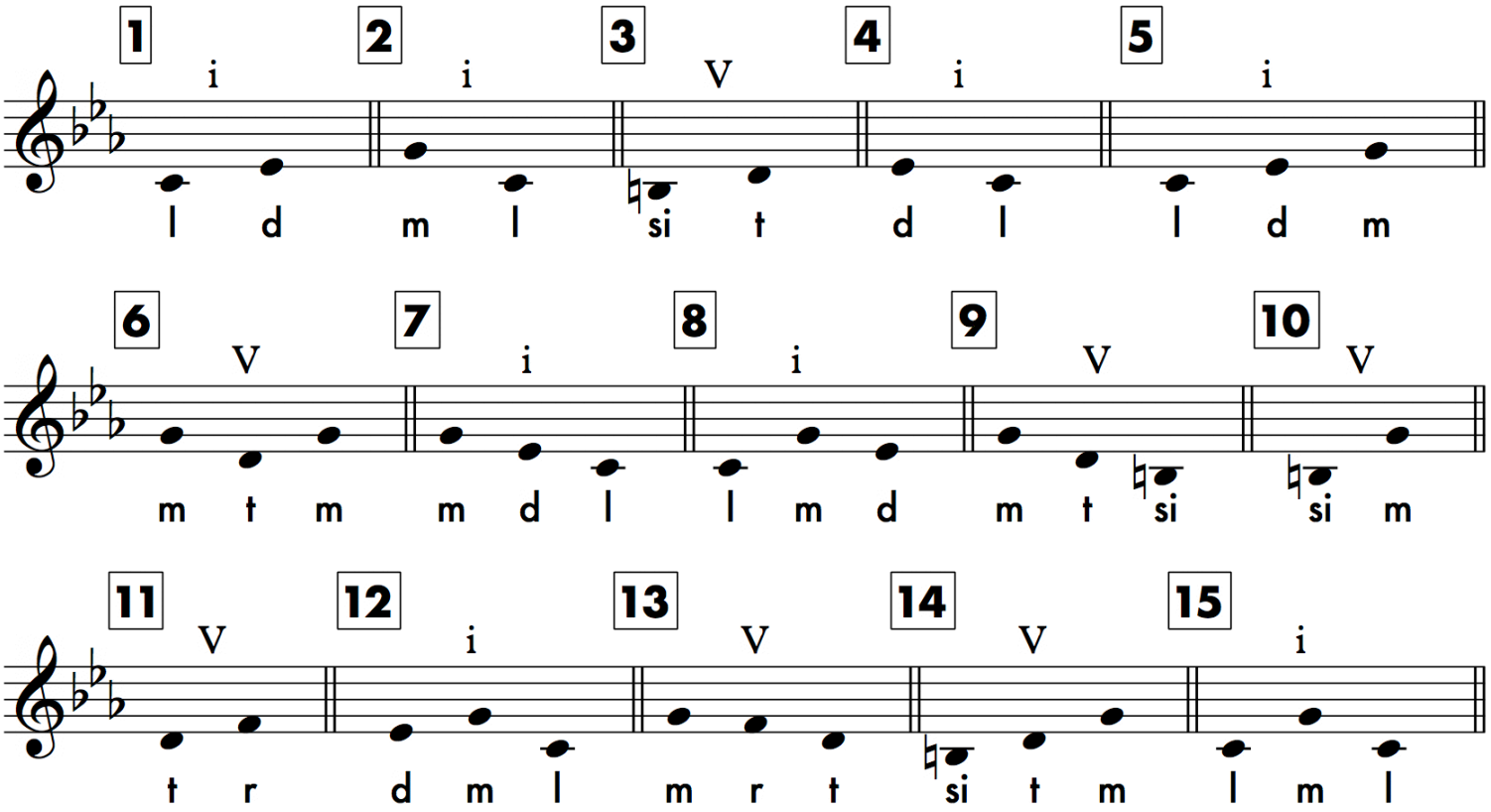


HARMONY

Major Tonality, I & V

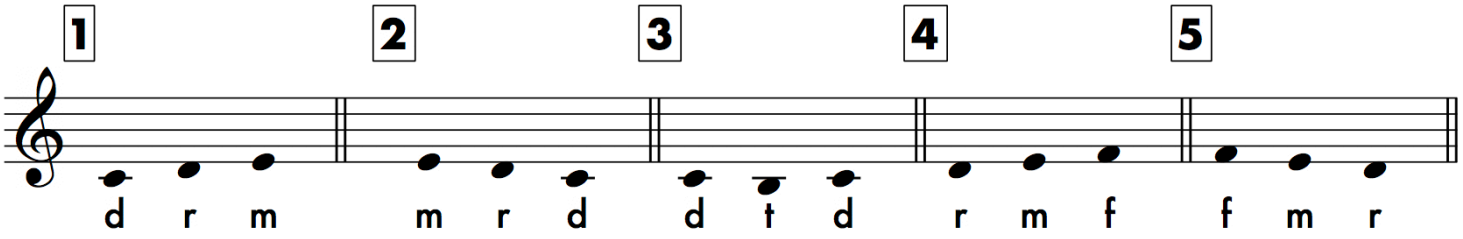


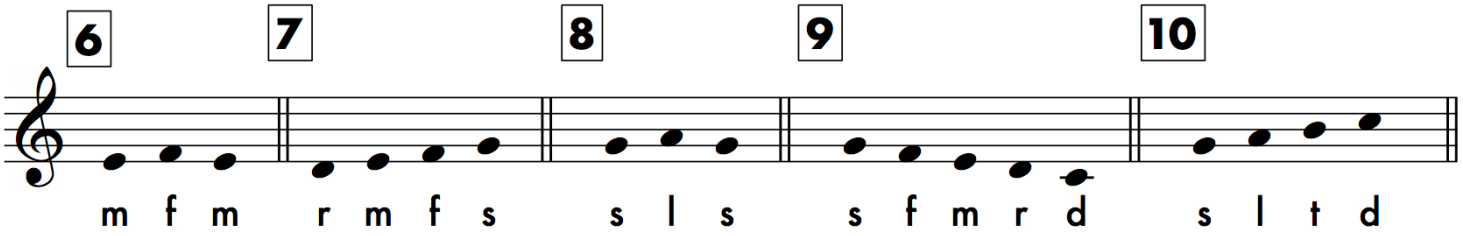
Minor Tonality, i & V



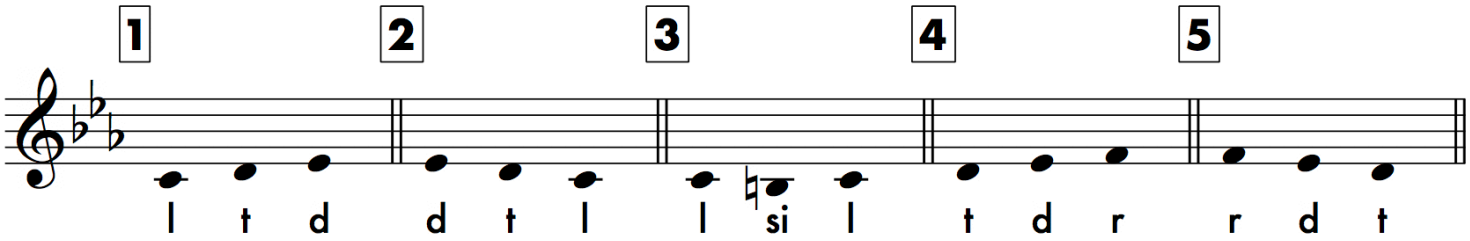
MELODY

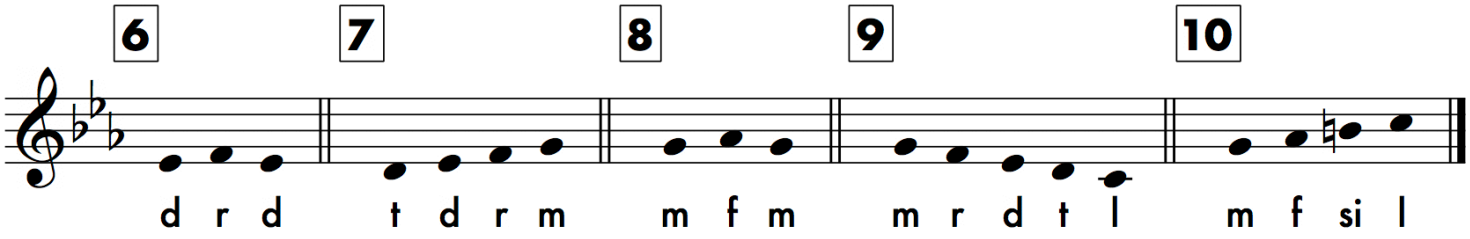
Major Tonality, Melodic Patterns





Minor Tonality, Melodic Patterns





RESOURCES

Musicianship Level 1 CD

This CD includes all of the audio lessons from Audiation Station YouTube series. Ideal for use in the car or during exercise. All of the patterns are on individual tracks.

$10

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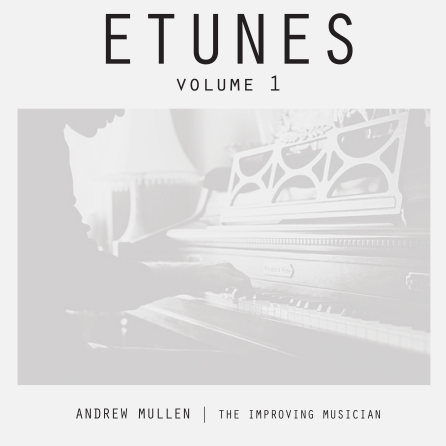
Etunes Vol. 1



8 repetitive songs in all tonalities and meters. Use these tunes to get the pitches and harmonic functions of each tonality into your audiation.

$7

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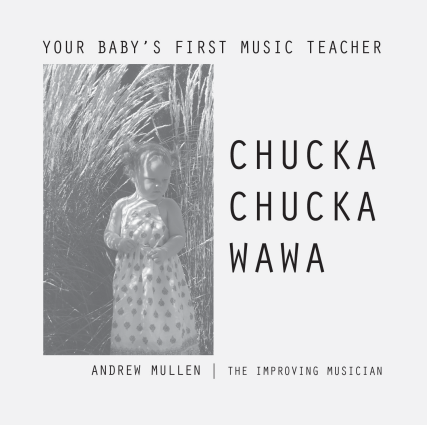
Chucka Chucka Wawa



10 vocal musings in all tonalities and meters. These loops are serve as useful music to play for your child to acculturate him to the language of music.

$8

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